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RR RUEHIK
DE RUEHVI #1426/01 3101237
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
R 061237Z NOV 09
FM AMEMBASSY VIENNA
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 3526
INFO RUCNMEM/EU MEMBER STATES

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 VIENNA 001426

SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR EUR/CE

SENSITIVE

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [AU](#)

SUBJECT: AUSTRIA: INTEGRATION STUDY SHOWS TURKS LAGGING

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¶1. (U) Summary: A recent study by the Interior Ministry indicates that Turks in Austria are lagging behind other immigrants in terms of integration. According to the study, Turks feel less integrated than other immigrants, believe they face more discrimination, and tend to identify themselves as Muslim more than as Austrian. Interior Ministry Fekter responded to the study with a set of proposals designed to encourage the integration of Muslims, particularly women, in the workforce. End Summary.

Study Results

¶2. (U) The study found that 83 percent of immigrants in Austria feel "fully" (36 percent) or "mostly" (47 percent) integrated. In the case of Turkish immigrants, only 26 percent feel fully integrated while 55 percent feel mostly integrated.

¶3. (U) Asked about whether religious law or state law was more important, a majority of immigrants - 54 percent - named state law, while 28 percent cited religious law. Among Turks, however, the results were reversed, with 57 percent choosing religious law and 28 percent state law. According to the study, young Turks (most of whom were born in Austria), those with less education, and women who are not employed identify more closely with Islam than others in the Turkish community. Moreover, the study indicated Turks in Austria socialize primarily within their own, parallel community and consume primarily Turkish-language media.

¶4. (U) Other results from the study include:

-- More than 75 percent of immigrants consider learning German "very important."

-- 85 percent of immigrants regard good education for their children as their most important goal.

-- 57 percent of immigrants say they face racism and xenophobia in Austria, and 46 percent believe immigrants lack opportunity.

-- 53 percent of Turkish immigrants believe they are discriminated against by the Austrian state, and nearly two thirds say they have had negative experiences with the majority population.

Comments on the Study

¶5. (U) A number of Austrian Muslims and integration experts responded to the study by emphasizing the roots of the Turkish community in the recruitment of unskilled Turkish labor as "guest workers" in the 1970s. Most remained in Austria and petitioned for their family members to join them. As the demand for unskilled labor declined, many lacked the education and training to find new jobs.

¶16. (U) The Austrian state, meanwhile, for a long time failed to provide support that might have helped the Turks integrate into Austrian society. As a result, many retreated into a kind of parallel society and began to identify themselves as Muslim, regardless of whether they practiced the faith (Note: a recent survey of Austrian Muslims indicated that only about 20 percent attend mosque regularly). Therefore, these experts maintain, Muslims choosing religious law over state law in the Interior Ministry study may have simply been expressing their sense of identity as Muslims, rather than advocating Sharia.

Interior Minister Responds

¶17. (U) In reaction to the study, Interior Minister Fekter proposed a set of measures aimed at integrating immigrants into the labor market and promoting gender equality. Fekter wants to stipulate that child support payments, provided for children up to age 18, be paid only on the condition that children are attending school or an apprenticeship program. The Interior Minister maintains that this measure will ensure that more young Turkish women receive the education and training they need to find employment. According to labor market figures, one third of Turkish girls stay at home after turning 16, without receiving any further education or securing employment. Fekter also proposed that immigrants pledge an oath to the Austrian flag when they obtain citizenship in order to enhance identification with the Austrian state. Fekter's critics argue that there are not enough apprenticeship positions available for the entire 16-18 population.

Comment: Muslims are Focus of Immigration Anxieties

¶17. (SBU) The results of this study support what we have seen in other surveys and observations - Muslims feel more alienated from

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Austrian society than other immigrant groups. And many Austrians, in turn, feel particularly threatened by Muslim immigration. When Austrians express their fears about integration, they are almost always talking about Muslims. The rightwing Freedom Party has exploited and fanned these fears with campaign rhetoric featuring references to mosques, minarets, and the need to prevent Vienna from "becoming Istanbul."